

---

# SKINNER MAKES IT FASHIONABLE

---

HENRY IRVING DODGE

---

















BOOKS BY  
**HENRY IRVING DODGE**

SKINNER MAKES IT FASHIONABLE  
HE MADE HIS WIFE HIS PARTNER  
THE YELLOW DOG  
SKINNER'S BIG IDEA

---

HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK  
ESTABLISHED 1817







"HE'S PERFECTLY INDISPENSABLE."

# SKINNER MAKES IT FASHIONABLE

*By*

HENRY IRVING DODGE

*Author of*

"SKINNER'S BIG IDEA" "SKINNER'S DRESS SUIT"

"SKINNER'S BABY" ETC.



HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS  
NEW YORK AND LONDON

SKINNER MAKES IT FASHIONABLE

---

Copyright 1920, by Harper & Brothers  
Printed in the United States of America  
Published February, 1920

C-U

TO MY WIFE





SKINNER  
MAKES IT FASHIONABLE



## SKINNER MAKES IT FASHIONABLE

AT twelve o'clock midnight, precisely, on the 1st of November, 1919, William Manning Skinner, junior partner of McLaughlin, Perkins & Co., resolved to set the town of Meadeville by the ears—in a sensational way. Skinner designed doing this for purposes of his own. Meadeville was a suburban town of the highest class. It was made up of plutocrats, prigs, good people, snobs, mean people, new-rich, new-poor. One hundred per cent. of the people of Meadeville were sincere at bottom, as all good Americans should be. One hundred per cent. were more or less hypocritical, as all good Americans—and everybody else—should not be but are. In a word, the people of Meadeville were everyday human

## 2 SKINNER MAKES IT FASHIONABLE

beings. They had their passions, good and bad, but mostly normal.

Just now the passion of the men was to make money. Just now the passion of the women was to spend money. In the present riot of gain and extravagance the people of Meadeville rivaled the Parisians in the time of John Law and the Great Mississippi Bubble. War graft and war extortion had made many of the Meadevilleites rich beyond the dreams even of an American. Men who had mowed their own lawns at most ungodly hours now rode in their own limousines at the same kind of hours. Instead of trundling coal-scuttles they now trundled bulky wads, a pathetic fact due to a desire constantly to exhilarate themselves by the reminder of the possession of unaccustomed power and their emancipation from slavery.

The one great exception to the heterogeneous society of Meadeville was the Stephen Colbys. The Colbys had spent much of their time abroad. They knew their London, their Paris, their Vienna, their Cairo, their Shanghai, and their Yokohama,



an experience which left them gentle, quiet, sure of themselves, and lovable New-Yorkers. Though they had a large estate there, the Colbys were not socially of Meadeville. Livingston Meade, after whom the town was named, was Mrs. Colby's grandfather. She had married Stephen Colby, who was of her own set socially and financially, in New York. The Colbys' intimate friends still lived on lower Fifth Avenue.

Few persons of Meadeville ever stuck their legs under the mahogany at family dinners at the Colbys', the rare exceptions being the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church and Mr. and Mrs. William Manning Skinner. Mrs. Colby had met Skinner at a church festival and had danced with him. It was the night Skinner had worn his first dress suit and was only a clerk. She had had an affection for him ever since. Skinner was good-looking, original, clever. Honey was a Rutherford. That was enough so far as she was concerned. Once admitted to the charmed circle, the Skinners had worn well. To both Stephen and his good lady the young man had been something

#### 4 SKINNER MAKES IT FASHIONABLE

of a problem at first. That was years ago. They observed him for a time, detected no sign of presumption, and presently concluded that Skinner was not only a man of good blood, but as near absolutely honest as any one they'd ever known. After that they accepted him unreservedly.

Nor did Skinner capitalize his close friendship with the Colbys. He was the same good old Skinner he had been when he rode back and forth in the smoker with the other clerks. Once or twice shrewd adventurers had made Skinner very tempting offers to put them in touch with Stephen Colby in order to promote some philanthropic enterprise. But Sinner was a shrewd old mouse and avoided the bait.

"He has such faith in you, Skinner," one adventurer had urged, "that if you say the word he'll go in."

"That's just the trouble," said Skinner. "Nothing doing."

Because of their newly gotten fortunes a good many of the women of Meadeville had gone mad socially. They had always regarded social life as one long, money-spend-

ing, female - figure - exposing, diamond-exploiting carnival—the whole most enviable. But being posted only through the social columns of the papers, they had come to put the decentest and quietest Americans in the aforesaid carnivalistic class. And now that they—the new-rich—had money they were going to have everything that their souls had longed for. Splendid mansions were built or old estates were refurbished; high-priced cars and high-priced chauffeurs to go with them obtained. Furs, feathers, and other finery covered the precious persons of the plutocrats' wives and daughters. Often one saw five hundred dollars' worth of fur on five dollar's worth of woman. All this accomplished, but one thing remained to be bought—real social preferment. And this could only be got through the Colbys.

The good plutocrats of Meadeville found the atmosphere of The Hill quite prohibitively chilly. Quite logically then the keenest social rivalry developed as to which of the young matrons could either jump over or break down the Colby bars. Be-

cause of his intimacy with the Colbys some of the ingenious ones thought to use Skinner as the logical mount to carry them into the Colby inclosure, but again nothing doing.

So much for Skinner. So much for the Colbys. So much for Meadeville.

Then why should the gentle, quiet, lovable and peace-loving William Manning Skinner precisely at twelve o'clock midnight on the 1st of November, 1919, resolve to set the good people of Meadeville by the ears in a sensational way? The whole thing came about in this way: On the afternoon of the 1st of November, 1919, the office force of McLaughlin, Perkins & Co., consisting of sixteen good men and true, who lived mostly in cheap apartments in Brooklyn and the Bronx, asked for another raise. Also why should the reasonable demand of these meek and modest men of Brooklyn and the Bronx prompt Skinner to resolve to cause an upheaval in the aristocratic Meadeville, a town in no way connected with, bearing on, or in any sense responsible for the circumstances of the aforesaid meek and modest gentlemen?

The same evening Skinner, having finished his second demi-tasse, looked across the table at his yellow-haired little wife.

"Honey," said he, "you keep all your tradesmen's bills, don't you?"

"Why, yes."

"Six months back?"

She nodded.

"I'd like you to let me see them, if you don't mind."

Presently Honey handed Skinner a sheaf of papers.

"Thanks," said he, rising. "I'm going to the library."

Honey seated herself again and toyed with her coffee-spoon. She was perplexed, then a bit worried, then a little apprehensive. What did he want with those bills? Surely the figures were right! She'd gone over them herself. Had she been extravagant? Dearie had never questioned her judgment before. Of course he wasn't going to scold her. But he had a way of making reproachful remarks that she dreaded more than a scolding. She knew that the bills had been mounting in the last six months. That



wasn't her fault. She hadn't bought anything more. She may have paid more.

For twenty minutes she sat there pondering, a bit perplexed, a bit worried, a little apprehensive. Once—her curiosity getting the better of her—she half rose. No, she'd wait. But why? What?

Meanwhile Skinner was assiduously making an investigation. He compared the total of each bill with that of the next, and so on, noting the more or less erratic increase over a period of months. Then he went back and examined each item in an effort to account for the increase—sugar, lard, beef, eggs, butter, and the like. This was the first time Skinner had ever come face to face with the real figures. He'd been too absorbed in big things in town to bother with Honey's department. Nor did he particularly care, for his expenses were far within his income.

The reason for Skinner's present inspectorial activity was as follows: That afternoon, as before stated, when the office force of McLaughlin, Perkins & Co. had, through their spokesman, Hemingway, respectfully

requested another raise, the senior partner had demurred. Said he to Hemingway:

"If I keep on advancing you boys in order that you may keep pace with the high cost of living, as you claim, where's it all going to end? How long can any concern stand it? It's not a vicious circle—it's a vicious spiral standing on its point. It gets wider as you go up. No end in sight."

So senior partner and spokesman had argued pro and con. Presently McLaughlin offered the following compromise:

"Instead of the definite sum you ask I'll raise you enough to cover the new increase in the cost of living."

It was agreed that Skinner should be umpire, an honor involving certain intricate research with endless ramifications and the determination of the relations of certain parts to and bearing upon the whole question, a job that neither McLaughlin nor Hemingway hankered for. So Skinner had undertaken the job with an outward show of cheerfulness and an inward metaphorical gnashing of teeth.

As Skinner went over the bills he grunted.

## 10 SKINNER MAKES IT FASHIONABLE

McLaughlin and Hemingway must have had their tongues in their cheeks when they asked him to do it, even if he were an expert accountant.

"Strike an average," McLaughlin had said with a nonchalant waving of the hand—"just an average."

Skinner was good enough at straight business, but the figures before him indicated no mercantile principle on which he might base calculations. Casually his eye turned to the headings of the evening paper at the side of his desk.

CONGRESS GETS AFTER THE PROFITEERS  
THE GOVERNOR APPOINTS A COMMITTEE TO  
INVESTIGATE

PROFESSOR A. W. FERGUSON TELLS HOW IN-  
DUSTRIAL TROUBLES MAY BE CORRECTED  
THROUGH REDUCING THE PRICE OF  
FOOD

"No wonder they can't get anywhere with such a proposition as that," Skinner thought. "I can't make head or tail out of even these little figures here."

He slapped the bunch of bills disgustedly. It not being Skinner's nature to give up easily, he went at the figures again, pertinaciously, assiduously.

"Gosh!" he said, frowning and clenching his fists from time to time. "By gosh!"

Presently he pushed back from the desk, flung his feet across the corner of it, and lighted a cigar.

"I'll put some professional accountant on the job, some delver into the mysteries of economics. I don't see why I should waste my gray matter on it. Let him work it out if he can. Darn him, if he can."

Skinner's morose reflections were interrupted by a knock at the door—Honey's knock. He knew that knock. He loved it. And it was never more welcome than now.

"Come in, Honey!" he shouted. "Come in!"

Honey tiptoed over and stood at Skinner's shoulder, her brows puckered.

"Anything wrong, dear?" she asked, very sweetly. "I haven't paid twice, or anything like that, have I?"

"Not two times, but twice as much as you should," Skinner grunted. "That wasn't your fault, though."

"Whose, then?"

"Partly mine — partly ~ everybody's." Skinner shook his head. "It's the fault of the whole universe, I guess. It's a great big question and it's all scrambled up."

Honey's eyes went from the bills to the evening paper. Ah, there was a connection between Skinner's present activity and those awful headings—"Congress"—"The Governor"—"Professor Ferguson!" Suddenly she clapped her hands gleefully.

"Oh, I've got it!"

"Got what?" said Skinner, a bit irritated, a bit perplexed.

"You're going to solve the problem of the high cost of living. I'm so glad—oh, I'm so glad," she rattled on before Skinner could stop her. "Aren't you, you old dear?"

Skinner was silent.

"Aren't you, you old dear?" Honey insisted.

Skinner searched Honey's face for the playfully ironical smile he expected to find



there. Skinner was suspicious. Honey had at times put one over on him. It had been her gentle way of taking him down a peg. Was she trying to do it now? No, she was serious.

"Aren't you, you old dear?"

"By gosh!" said Skinner. Then again, "By gosh!"

"I knew it," cried Honey, delightedly. "I discovered your secret, didn't I?"

"Trust you for that!"

She settled herself on the arm of Skinner's chair and leaned cozily against his shoulder.

"Now, tell me just how you're going to do it."

Any man who had been less flattered by the unlimited confidence of his wife would have been flabbergasted. Skinner knew that she believed he could accomplish anything he might undertake. If there was one thing he valued above all others it was her supreme faith in his capacity for solving intricate and difficult problems—problems at which other men had notoriously failed. But there had come a time when Skinner

## 14 SKINNER MAKES IT FASHIONABLE

realized it would be a hard job to live up to the faith he had builded in Honey.

"I can tell by your face you've found a way," Honey persisted. "Don't be so modest."

Skinner was a conscientious man, but he was human withal—so human that it was very difficult to sacrifice any of the prestige that he had with his wife. He hated to shatter her faith—he hated even to agitate it.

"Uh-huh," said Skinner, giving the grunt an affirmative accent. "Uh-huh," he repeated. Thus on the impulse of the moment Skinner committed himself.

Honey threw her arms round his neck. "I'm so glad—so glad for everybody's sake." She pouted and pointed to the paper. "Those naughty old wiseacres down in Washington and those legislators and those professors have all tried it and failed, but you have a way of doing things."

Skinner took her hand and again looked into her eyes, arresting her speech. Was it possible she wasn't really acting? No, she wasn't.

Thought Skinner, "By gosh! I wonder if I haven't built her faith a step too high?"

"There, there, I'll let you alone now!" said Honey, presently, slipping down from her perch. "Perhaps you haven't figured it all out yet."

"Not yet—not quite all," Skinner observed.

When Honey had gone Skinner went over the bills again and again and in an abstracted way read and reread the articles in the paper about what Congress and the Governor and the various professors were doing about the high cost of living. Skinner often got things by letting his mind stay passive, by not trying to force things into it. So he sat there with perplexed eyes, smoked cigar after cigar, heard the clock strike ten, then eleven. Still no solution had come to him. Honey looked in at the door and said good night and Skinner got up and kissed her and then resumed his chair. He would stick it out. The thing had taken hold of him, fastened on him. He didn't think. He just pondered, let things drift through his mind, hoping that among them might

come a suggestion. He even tried to lure suggestion by fixing his mind on the general philosophy of the situation.

"Capital and labor," he thought—"one always passing the buck to the other. Labor taking it out of capital by high wages and capital taking it out of the great middle classes by high prices. The two bossing the whole job, yet not amounting to more than 10 per cent. of the population of the country—not more than 10 per cent. It's the consumer—the mild-mannered, acquiescent consumer—that's being plucked," Skinner concluded. Of course—that much was clear. But how could he get at the consumer—that was the question—get at him in a way that would make him sit up and take notice, do things.

Skinner frowned and reached for a fresh cigar. As he did so his eye fell on a small item in the paper. It lingered there. He sat a long time with the item before him and pondered in a more or less abstracted way. Suddenly he began to chuckle. He reached for the shears and clipped the item from the paper, read it again, then tucked it away

in the corner of his waistcoat pocket. He slapped his leg.

"That's the way to stand the egg on its end," he exclaimed. "By gosh! I'll do it! It'll set this town by the ears, all right. It'll make a sensation in this old burg."

And the clock struck twelve as if to accentuate Skinner's resolution. Remember, it was midnight on the 1st of November, 1919.

Skinner got up, put out the light, and went to bed.

"Well," said Honey, at breakfast next morning, "you've solved the whole question. I know it by your face."

Skinner drained his coffee-cup deliberately. Then, "I'm going to put a dent in it."

Honey clapped her hands. "How you going to do it?"

Skinner drew from his pocket the slip he had clipped from the paper the night before and tossed it across the table. "There's the key."

Honey read the bit twice over and tossed it back. "I can't make anything out of that."

Skinner replaced the slip in his pocket. "I'm going to show you how an idea born of a mere suggestion such as that slip contains, an idea as thin and elusive as the most attenuated ether, can be made tangible enough to shake this whole community."

"You frighten me," she cried, her eyes wide.

"Do I?" said Skinner. "You just watch!" He pondered. "I'll let you in on the first step. This very evening things will begin to happen."

Honey laughed. "Things usually do begin to happen in the evening."

"I'll be more definite then, you old doubting Thomas," said Skinner, a bit piqued. "This very evening a certain lady in Meadeville will call you up."

"Who?"

"I don't know."

"That doesn't mean anything. Certain ladies call me up every evening."

"To prove it"—Skinner drew a pad to him and scrawled a few lines, put it in an envelope, and sealed it—"some woman 'll

call you up and give you the message I've written in there. You see if she doesn't."

"Are you going to see some woman and have her call me up?"

"I am not. I'm not going near any woman."

Honey reflected. "That slip of paper hasn't anything to do with it?"

"It has everything to do with it."

Skinner didn't decide which of the Meadeville millionaires would be most available for his purpose until he was well on his way to town in the club car. It was the question that bothered him, for he had to reach the women through the men, a reversal of the usual diplomatic custom. There was Henderson. Henderson would be most sympathetic, for he was running a large establishment for the purpose of exploiting a wife and daughters. But he would not do. Mrs. Henderson stood in the way—too abrupt—no tact—sure to put her foot down on any suggestion the old man might make. He would like to have got Mrs. Henderson, for she was the most notorious spendthrift in Meadeville—best example. No, Hender-



son wouldn't do. Nor would Billings. Billings's wife was too much of an acquiescent gray mouse, colorless and not oversmart—no initiative. Morrisey was very rich—thanks to the war—but Mrs. M. was too uncouth—went about everything with a hammer and tongues—bragged about it. No, not Morrisey—couldn't hunt grizzlies with a brass band.

But there was Jenks—wiry, little, stubborn, cunning, sentimental Jenks. Skinner knew Jenks from the ground up; knew just what he'd do under certain circumstances. Mrs. Jenks was ambitious, Skinner reflected, even if she was superficial. She was attractive, but she was best of all a notorious fad-chaser. Yes, Jenks was the man.

Presently Skinner walked the length of the car and dropped into the seat next to Jenks. After a few preliminary remarks about business Skinner pulled out his watch and in doing so dislodged a slip of paper from his pocket and it fluttered to the floor. Jenks picked it up.

"By jingo!" said Skinner, reaching for it. "I'm glad I didn't lose that. I clipped it



from *The Sun* last night. Bully good suggestion—some society woman”—he stopped as if confused, then—“I mean—my wife and I were discussing it this morning.”

Jenks read the item and Skinner watched the little man, for he knew he was nibbling at the bait.

Jenks passed the paper back without any comment, but Skinner noticed a shrewd twinkle in his eyes, the kind of twinkle he had often seen there when something was brewing in the little man's head. After a while Jenks asked the very question Skinner knew he would ask:

“Last evening's *Sun*, you say?”

Skinner nodded.

Presently Jenks chucked his paper aside and began to puff his cigar vigorously.

“Bull's-eye!” Skinner said to himself.  
“Bull's-eye!”

No sooner had Jenks reached his office than he sent his office-boy for *The Evening Sun* of November 1st. When he received it he cut out the item Skinner had shown him and tucked it carefully away in the corner of his waistcoat pocket.

Then he called up Meadeville and told his wife he'd be home on the four-thirty and asked her to have an early dinner. As he hung up Jenks chuckled.

"This is the time I put one over on Skinner, all right."

At the same moment, almost, Skinner in his office drew the slip of paper from his pocket, read it, and chuckled.

"This is the time I put one over on Jenks, all right, by making him think he's putting one over on me."

Skinner was so good-natured all the afternoon that when McLaughlin said, "What progress, Skinner?" Skinner said: "Fine! I've started putting a dent in it."

And McLaughlin, who, above all things loved to put things off on Skinner, didn't question as to how he was doing it.

Jenks ate a light lunch in contemplation of an early dinner, but he had reckoned without his host—without his cook, at least, for when he reached home Fanny's first words were:

"Dick, I'm sorry to disappoint you, but just as soon as you 'phoned me I asked

Nora if it would be convenient to have an early dinner and she said positively no; that she'd made arrangements for a later one, and—"

Jenks had something more important than an early dinner on his mind, but here was a chance to express his opinion of all servants, and he did it vigorously, vitriolically, using epithets and characterizations that Fanny hadn't heard since she was a girl.

"But what's the big idea, Dick?" said Fanny.

Jenks took the slip of paper from his pocket.

"Read that."

"Well, what of it?" said Fanny, presently.

"What of it?" cried Jenks. "I'm going to put one over on Skinner—that's what of it."

Fanny was puzzled, even as Honey had been puzzled that morning.

"I don't see the connection between this bit of paper and putting one over on Skinner."

"Don't?" cried Jenks. "Well, I'll tell you." He looked round. Then, lowering

his voice: "Skinner dropped this accidentally in the car this morning. I picked it up for him. He was mighty glad to get it back, but a bit confused. Kind of blurted out that he and Honey had been discussing it, then stopped and stammered, 'Great chance for some society woman.' I read between the lines."

Fanny's eyes showed a dawning light. She reread the slip.

Jenks watched her. "See?" he cried. "Catch on?"

Fanny nodded.

"You don't want to lose any time. You want to have a big meeting here. Get ahead of the Skinners. Have it to-morrow night."

Fanny looked troubled. "To-morrow night? That's Nora's night off. And Binns—"

Jenks raised his clenched fists. "Nora be hanged! To hell with Binns! Do we always have to ask our servants whether we can have things in our own home? Can't have dinner to-night—can't have a meeting to-morrow night! I'll bring a car-load of servants from New York." He stamped

up and down. "Send for Binns. I'll tell him."

Fanny raised her hands. "Oh, please, please don't, Dick! You can't tell what might happen. Binns might get angry."

"I know what 'd happen if he got mad before me. You go on. 'Phone the Skinners—'phone 'em at once. That'll head 'em off, show 'em you thought of it first—prior right, you know."

When Skinner got home that night Honey's first words were, "Mrs. Jenks called me up."

"Quick work, Jenks, my boy," Skinner commented.

Skinner crossed to his desk, picked up the envelope he had sealed that morning, tore it open, and read, "'Some Meadeville lady will call you up to say that she's going to have a big meeting at her house to discuss the high cost of living.'"

Honey turned wide-eyed to Skinner. "How ever did you do it?"

"I didn't do it." Skinner took the slip of paper from his pocket. "It was this. This little slip of paper did more in a minute

than I could have done in a year. This whole high-cost-of-living bugaboo is psychological. I'm going to prove it."

"And this meeting is your first step?"

"Uh-huh."

"And what's the next?"

Skinner made enigmatic answer.

"Every arch has a keystone." He picked up the 'phone and asked for the Colby number. Presently: "Oh, good evening, Mrs. Colby. You and Mr. Colby well? . . . Splendid! . . . She's fine, thank you. . . . Oh yes! Mrs. Colby, will you let me run over a few minutes? I've something of importance. . . . Thank you—yes, in a very few minutes. . . . Good-by." Skinner hung up.

Honey looked astounded. "You're not going to ask Mrs. Colby to that meeting, dearie?"

"I am."

"Have you lost your head?"

"It's a part of my scheme."

"But she wouldn't go to the Jenkses' in a thousand years."

"You just leave it to me," said Skinner.

"But," Honey pleaded, "you wouldn't ask Mrs. Colby to do anything to push along your scheme?"

"I wouldn't ask Mrs. Colby to do anything—only go to the meeting."

Skinner took his hat and stick and started for the Colbys'.

"Well?" said Honey when Skinner returned an hour later.

Skinner patted her head caressingly, then crossed to his desk and got the Jenkses on the 'phone.

"Mrs. Jenks. . . . Yes. Mr. Skinner speaking." Then, in a few seconds: "Oh, good evening, Mrs. Jenks. I want to add my thanks to those of my wife. It was wonderful of you to think of it. I know it'll be a big hit." He turned and winked deliberately at Honey, then: "Oh, by the way, Mrs. Jenks, you wouldn't mind if I bring Mrs. Colby over, would you? . . . Yes, Mrs. Stephen Colby." He put his hand over the receiver. "It's a knock-out. I can fairly hear her gasp." Then, "Yes, Mrs. Jenks, Mrs. Stephen Colby from The Hill."



Skinner waited, bored, while Mrs. Jenks babbled on, and when she presently said good-by hung up. "How they do give themselves away!" He paused. "Gosh! but the lady on The Hill has a pull!"

"That's because she stays on The Hill," said Honey.

"It won't take Mrs. J. long to flash that bit of news over the wires—if anybody should ask you," said Skinner.

Many persons who had accepted the Jenkses' invitation tentatively, knowing such affairs to be a bore, anyway, no sooner heard from their neighbors who had accepted that Mrs. Colby was to be present than they swept aside all contingencies and accepted. Those who had declined positively, resenting any preachment about the question of the high cost of living now that they had just got so that they could live high, when they heard that there was a chance to meet Mrs. Colby recollected that they hadn't "married a wife" or "bought an ox," and recalled their declinations.

Said Driggs, the gas-mask king, to his good lady, "You'll have a chance to show



Mrs. Colby that you ain't any slouch when it comes to sparklers and glad rags."

Said the socks baron, who had made big money out of reinforced heels and toes for the boys in khaki, to Mrs. Socks Baron: "What are you so excited about—meeting that old lady on The Hill? You're good enough to be on her calling-list, anyhow. Look at the names I've got on my working-list! W. Irving Pelham, Bedford de Peyster, Rhinelander Milliken—every one of my office force is a pedigreed critter." The baron took a long draft of smoke and blew it out through his nose. "Is it not a funny world that I who furnish these men with their daily bread am not considered good enough to sit at their dinner-tables?" He paused to mark the change of subject, then: "Listen, my dear. If I'm the business man I think I am my opinion is worth something. Let me give you a hint. You can't impress a swell like Mrs. Colby by talking cheap living. You got to act refined. Make a show! Talk big money!"

In the home of W. Bentinck Bentinck, personal representative of the gas-mask

king at a salary commensurate with his pedigree and alleged social influence, the news that Mrs. Colby was going to be at the Jenkses' meeting was received with much surprise.

W. Bentinck Bentinck came of an old New York family. It is said that the Lodges talk with the Lowells, but the Lowells talk only with God. New York had gone Boston one better. The Bentincks talked only with the Bentincks. But W. B. B. was not only a gentleman—he was a good sport. He had to earn his living and he did it like a gentleman. Furthermore, he never poked fun at or spoke slightingly of his employer. Such a thing, in his esteem, would not have been compatible with taking the money Driggs paid him.

"How do you suppose they ever got Mrs. Colby?" said Minnie, who used to be a Ten Broeck.

"Philanthropy—civic appeal—that's the only way."

"What a chance for Mrs. Jim Biddle!" said Minnie.

"If she's there there'll be something doing."

"I shudder to think of it."

William Manning Skinner was pre-eminently a genius in selecting his captains, his actors, and in staging his scenes. Of his captains he required quick wit, spunk enough to talk right out in meeting should occasion rise, and irrepressibility. Therefore, after advising Honey of his success with Mrs. Colby, Skinner took his hat and stick and strolled to the home of the formidable Mrs. Jim Biddle. He was glad to find Mrs. Jim alone, for Biddle was a quiescent, neutral - tinted, afraid-of-his-own-shadow, cold-water-throwing proposition.

Skinner quickly outlined his plan. When he had finished he said: "You see, I can't do what I'm asking you to do, because I've been a fool myself, like Jenks and the others. It'd be like a sinner suddenly turned saint. They'd laugh at me. But you've got an ax to grind—a very real ax. They'll listen to you. Will you help me, Mrs. Jim?"

The little woman stuck out her pointed, defiant face and her eyes snapped.

"Will I help you, Will Skinner? I should

say so! It's worth a year's living to say some things to some folks."

"I thought you'd feel that way about it." Skinner lifted an admonishing finger. "Remember, Mrs. Jim, you're doing this on your own initiative. I'm not to be known in it."

Mrs. Jim grinned. "I get you, Will Skinner!"

And Skinner grinned back at Mrs. Jim. "Good night, Mrs. Jim."

"Good night, Will Skinner."

The residence of Mr. and Mrs. Munitions Jenks just beyond the edge of the town was a hoary, mellow monument to the memory of the old landed baron Latourette. Hence its aristocratic outward bearing. But it had been made over inside to suit the smart proclivities and bad taste of Mrs. Jenks. Architects, decorators, and furniture men had been called in ostensibly to suggest, but in reality only to confirm, the preconceived notions of the present mistress of the house. And so all the fine old character of the place had been improved out of it. Instead, the rooms were overdecorated, overfurnished,

and over-everything-elsed. It was anything but a home. It would better have been called a servants' hotel de luxe.

The Jenkses' grounds were extensive, the Jenkses' rooms were large, the Jenkses' men-servants were all portly fellows suggesting opulence. Characteristic of these serving-men were large feet and small hands, which was quite natural, since their feet were forever carrying great bulks about the premises while their hands rarely descended to any duty weightier than a visiting-card or a tea-tray. A portly butler opened the door for you and took your card on a tiny tray that might have been borne by a child of six. At tea-time a portly butler in extreme livery threaded his way through the gathering bearing a tray with tiny cups, each containing a thimbleful, while a second man—also portly—bore a sugar-bowl and a precious pair of tongs with which he daintily dropped a lump or two into your cup, according to your pleasure.

The male servitors of Mrs. Jenks's establishment were so ubiquitous and withal so much better looking than the customary

male visitors that, but for their livery, one might have taken them for guests. Mrs. Jenks seemed bent on exploiting her servants rather than keeping them in the background. But she was a bad captain. She fluttered about, directing the elephantine bearers of teacups and sugar-tongs like a child with a new toy. It reminded one of a doll leading a wonderfully caparisoned Jumbo through a crowd.

Such were the servants, such was the house, such were the Jenkses, in the order of their present importance.

The meeting to discuss the high cost of living was called by Mrs. Jenks for eight o'clock. Promptly at that hour, there being an attendance full to overflowing, the hostess started the ball of discussion rolling.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said she—the fact that she was dressed in silk, cut low at the neck, and stood with her white elbow resting on the edge of the grand piano is of no importance except to women readers and men observers. "Ladies and gentlemen," said she, in a voice carefully rehearsed for the occasion, "I have asked you to come



here to-night to take up the question of the high cost of living—a question in which we are all deeply interested. I am not going to make a speech. This is a general forum. The meeting is now open to everybody.” The ever-present fear that Mrs. Colby might be bored prompted the lady to raise her finger enjoiningly. “I am going to beg that no one will speak for more than two minutes at any one time.”

At this there was a general murmur of approval, then a silence indicating the same kind of hesitation one notices at a church experience meeting when the pastor calls for testimonies.

Presently Mrs. Army Shoes Bingham spoke up. Mrs. Army Shoes was in the habit of speaking up when in the presence of her peers. But now she was breathing the sanctified atmosphere of a Colby. She must modify.

“I think we owe Mrs. Jenks a vote of thanks for giving us this opportunity to get together to protest against the outrageous cost of living,” said Mrs. Army Shoes, rising.

A general murmur of, "Hear! Hear!"

Mrs. Army Shoes would have continued, but Mrs. Army Undershirts Smythe, whose husband—next to Army Shoes Bingham—had made the biggest killing out of the war, broke in. Mrs. Army Undershirts had a brain like maple sugar. With a placating eye on Mrs. Colby, she began:

"I hate to differ with Mrs. Jenks, but for my part I don't see why we should complain. Of course we are sorry for the poor, but don't high prices mean good times?"

"Good times for plumbers and grocers," jerked out Canned Beans Henderson.

"This promises to be interesting," whispered Holden, clerk, to his neighbor, also clerk.

But Mrs. Undershirts had too carefully rehearsed her speech—contrived to conciliate Mrs. Colby, for all the new-rich present felt that the lady from The Hill must be on their side—to be deflected by sneers. She cast a deprecating glance at Canned Beans and went right on:

"Should not we spend our money freely?



Don't the government urge everybody not to hoard?"

At this Mrs. Socks Baron, who—next to Mrs. Army Shoes—felt it incumbent to be on her feet, stood up.

"I, too, don't see why we shouldn't spend our money. What else is there to do with it? Now that the bond drives are over, there's no longer any need for saving."

"That may be very well in your case, Mrs. Stein," said Henry Higgins, cashier of the Meadeville First National, "but I happen to know that in a great many cases Liberty bonds haven't been paid for yet."

"Oh, dear!" cried little Annabelle Howe—also army shoes—putting her hands to her head. They were beautiful white hands and wonderfully well jeweled. Annabelle affected humorous perturbation. "It's all scrambled up—the whole thing is fearfully scrambled up. I've had to engage a social secretary to keep things straight."

"What do you pay her, ma'am?" said Canned Beans Henderson, who was looking for information.

The question was ignored.

Here old Jimmy Dooling — commonly called Money Bags Dooling—piped up from the red-silk sofa that matched his red face and tie and set off his white hair and spats strikingly.

“So are all big questions scrambled up, Mrs. Howe. We must unscramble this one. So let us begin at the beginning. We’ll assume that the profiteer’s at the bottom of it all. Let’s tackle him first.”

“Profiteer!” giggled Annabelle. “To me that’s only an expression born of the war—like camouflage.”

“And where can you put your finger on a real profiteer, Mr. Dooling?” sneered Mrs. Seth Craddock, who made it a point to oppose everything Dooling said and who was forever begging to correct and inform him, much to that gentleman’s exasperation.

Dooling hated Mrs. Craddock. He hated her frowsy false bang and her little, near-set, spiteful eyes that peered out from under it like a dog watching you from under a hedge; he hated her high-arched nose, suggestive of loftiness and sneering; he hated her remarkably high stomach, which she

carried prominently and with much pride and dignity, as became an aristocrat, an authority, a woman of wealth; he even hated the old black-velvet dress covered with beads which she always wore and which had turned him against all black-velvet dresses and beads. In brief, old Jimmy Dooling hated all of Mrs. Seth Craddock.

"That's a funny question, ma'am. Every child knows you can't throw a stone without hitting one." He snickered. "I'll send you a few addresses so you'll know him next time you see him."

"Trouble is," chimed in Army Soups Porter, "when you blame the retailer he passes the buck to the wholesaler and the wholesaler passes the buck to the producer and the producer passes the buck to high wages and high wages passes the buck back to the high cost of living—and there you are, back on the door-step of the retailer again."

Bentinck nudged his wife.

"Chestnuts! Ancient and moldy chestnuts!" he whispered.

"Just to show you," Army Soups went

on, "my grocer said to me, when I jumped him: 'My landlord's profiteerin' on me—I have to pay more rent; my plumber's profiteerin' on me—I have to pay more for my plumbin'; and my help's profiteerin' on me—I have to pay 'em more. Why,' said he, 'I'd have to put up prices to pay the plumber alone.'"

"And it's up to us to pay his plumber's bill?" said Dooling.

"Then let's start with the plumber," said Mrs. Craddock. "He must be the basic profiteer from whom all evils flow."

"No," said Army Soups, "'cause when I jumped my plumber he said he had to charge more 'cause his groceries were so high."

At this a large woman with fire in her eyes struggled to her feet.

"Everybody blames the plumber!" she cried. "They've always called him a thief and a liar. Now they call him a profiteer to boot. He ain't to blame. My husband's a plumber. It costs us forty dollars a week for our table, an' there's only two of us. The grocer and the butcher 'ain't got anything on us."

"Any way you put it, we have to pay the freight in the long run," said Dooling.

"But you can afford to, Mr. Dooling," said Mrs. Henry Matthews, whose husband was shipping-clerk for Slocum Bass. "Trouble is, we have to pay the freight too—and we can't afford it."

"How I hate to hear folks talk poverty!" whispered Mrs. Socks Baron to Mrs. Army Shoes Bingham.

At this point Mrs. James Nichols—also canned beans—put her lorgnette to her eyes and surveyed the left wing of the party, where the gregarious poor were gathered.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Matthews," she observed, "but the salaried persons"—she'd only recently learned to say persons instead of people—"are not the only sufferers."

Mrs. Colby cast a quick glance at Skinner, who, but for the slight twitching of the left corner of his mouth, betrayed no astonishment at Canned Beans' lady's words.

"My fruit bill," Mrs. Nichols went on, "with alligator pears at prohibitive prices and grape-fruit—a special kind, of course,

because Jim simply won't have any other—is something positively appalling.”

Old Jimmy Dooling, catching Skinner's eye, winked covertly, for Jim Nichols had been one of Dooling's bookkeepers only five years before.

“And I haven't money enough even to ride down in an elevator,” whispered Charley Biggs, bookkeeper, to Albert Case, chief clerk.

“And since you can so easily locate what duller persons find it so difficult to locate, what do you propose doing with these rascally profiteers, Mr. Dooling?” said Mrs. Craddock.

“Quite obvious, ma'am. Stop patronizing 'em while they are profiteers. They're all organized against us. We're not organized against them. We're the suckers, you and I are, Mrs. Craddock.” Dooling smiled sweetly.

The high-stomached aristocrat didn't relish being hitched up with Money Bags Dooling as a sucker, but nothing was further from her than to let Dooling see that she didn't.

"We're the suckers, all right," spoke up Worthington Briggs—army tins—who up to two years ago, when he used to mow his own lawn and sprint for the station every morning on toast and eggs, was a fine specimen of a man, but now, for obvious reasons, graphically nicknamed Flabby Briggs. "But we've got to eat, haven't we? They've got us by the throat, haven't they?"

"I wouldn't call all grocers profiteers," protested Mrs. Billings—also undershirts—mildly. "Mine is an awfully good one. He advises me just how to buy—saves so much of my time."

"Over the 'phone, ma'am?" suggested Dooling, catching Skinner's eye again and winking.

"Either that way or through my butler. My butler has a wonderful knowledge of how to buy."

"No doubt," said Dooling.

There was a general snicker among the gregarious poor. Mrs. Nichols resented Dooling's inquisitorial way.

"I assure you, Mr. Dooling, my butler is



quite indispensable. Really, he's worth twice what I pay him."

"And as we don't know what you pay him, how can we tell how indispensable he is?"

Mrs. Nichols hesitated and old lady Craddock spoke up:

"My dear, tell Mr. Dooling what you pay the butler. It's your own affair, of course, but he wants to know."

Dooling gave Mrs. Craddock one of his sweetest smiles, then turned again to Mrs. Nichols:

"If you don't go to the shop yourself, ma'am, how can you tell you're getting what you order or getting the right weight?"

"My, but ain't he the old death's-head at the feast?" whispered Mrs. Socks Baron to Mrs. Army Shoes Bingham.

Mrs. Jenks sensed the approach of a dispute. There must be no friction while Mrs. Colby was there.

"We trust," she said, with infinite sweetness, for Dooling was a multimillionaire, "that most of the ladies here also have absolutely reliable butlers who do the buy-

ing. We haven't the time to deal directly with tradesmen. I trust my servants absolutely." She cast an affectionate eye at her butler—generously bonused to remain and serve, it being his night off—and second man, who lingered near a rear door, catching bits of gossip for retailing belowstairs. "I know servants. I've had quite a number in the last two years."

"I thought so," muttered Mrs. Craddock; then, raising her voice: "I always do my own marketing. It's the only way I can live within my income these days." Mrs. Craddock kept an enormous establishment. "How could I pick out a piece of beef over the telephone?" She glared at Mrs. Jim Nichols. "I can't see it. And I can't stand over my butler when he weighs it. It's wonderful how much weight meat loses traveling from butcher to consumer when you don't do your own shopping."

"I can vouch for the truth of what Mrs. Craddock says," said Dooling. "I used to be a butcher's assistant when I was a boy."

The nose of Mrs. Socks Baron went into

the air at Dooling's allusion to his previous condition of servitude.

"I didn't know that I had to be vouched for," observed Mrs. Craddock, loftily, shooting a cutting glance down her long nose at Dooling.

"I, too, can vouch for the truth of what Mrs. Craddock says," said Mrs. Time Clerk Wilson, rising, her face florid from much cooking. "And I'll tell you why I can vouch for the truth of what Mrs. Craddock says. I went to my butcher for chopped meat. 'Fifty cents a pound,' said he.

"Seems to me a cheaper cut would do just as well," said I.

"Better," said the butcher, when he found I wouldn't pay that much. He brought me out a piece of beef—chuck, he called it. It didn't sound so good, but it was streaked with fat and much better for grinding. He let me have it for thirty-six cents a pound. Out of one pound I made eight large meat-cakes for supper. Do you think I'd have got that much over the telephone? Not on your life!"

Mrs. Jenks blushed deep with mortification that one of her guests should mention chuck steak, particularly chuck steak streaked with fat, in the presence of the lady from The Hill. She raised her hand.

"Just a minute, Mrs. Wilson."

Jenks edged close to his wife. "Why do you shut her off?" he whispered.

"No one wants to hear that kind of vulgar talk here, you goose. This is a social affair," Mrs. Jenks whispered back.

Jenks groaned in his heart. "I'd hoped it would be something more," he said, turning away.

Mrs. Jenks turned. "Pardon me for interrupting, Mrs. Wilson, but Mrs. Howe has the floor."

Annabelle Howe was standing. Again she was humorously perturbed. Again she put her beautiful white and heavily jeweled hands to her head in a charming, puzzled and much-rehearsed little way.

Whispered Minnie Bentinck to W. B. B.: "What's the matter with Mrs. Jim Biddle? Never a word!"

"Scared of Mrs. Colby," said Bentinck,

whose great pride was his sophisticated knowledge of men and women.

"I wonder?" queried Minnie.

"This talk about grocers is all very well," Annabelle began, "but I don't know, because I don't come in actual contact with such persons."

"She did four years ago," Minnie Bentinck murmured for Bentinck's ear alone.

"It's the milliners and the tailors and all that sort of thing we're actually compelled to meet. Really we couldn't buy a hat or a gown without meeting them, you know. I should call them the profiteers. I'll tell you how I know. I went to town to shop yesterday. I selected four hats. They didn't show me anything under forty dollars. Think of it! I suppose it's this curtailed production one hears so much about." She smiled at Mrs. Colby. "Those shop people knew I just had to have them. I was helpless, you see."

"To my certain knowledge that woman's been trying to get on Mrs. Colby's calling-list for a year," muttered Jimmy Dooling to Dick Smith at his right.

"That kind of talk won't put her there," observed Smith. "I know the Colbys."

N. B. Fleming broke in: "Let me tell you some of my experiences—er—hats fourteen dollars—er—and—er—shoes twenty dollars—and—er—er—"

For the first time Jimmy Dooling stood up, bored.

"Your experiences are not unique, Mr. Fleming. You'll pardon me, but I understand we came to this meeting to do something. We've heard nothing but talk, talk, talk. Let's act. Let's get somewhere."

"But we've got to talk, Mr. Dooling—talk it over—or there couldn't be any discussion, could there?" appealed the hostess, sweetly.

"Maybe," said Dooling, "but we don't do things that way in my office."

"Only one person does the talking there, Mr. Dooling, I imagine," said Mrs. Craddock.

"And not much of that, thank you kindly, ma'am."

Mrs. Jenks sensed the approach of the usual clash between Dooling and Mrs.

Craddock, for the antagonism of the pair was notorious.

"Mr. Dooling, before I forget it I want your opinion of a new brand of coffee. Binns is about to serve it now. Everybody knows you're the best judge in town."

"I'd rather sip coffee than talk, Mrs. Jenks."

The butler and the second man, off stage, having got the cue, immediately began to circulate, the one with cups and coffee-pot, the other with sugar and tongs. When Binns and Betts had presently retired, leaving their ears behind them, Canned Beans Henderson renewed the discussion:

"We've been calling the butcher and the grocer profiteers, but we haven't mentioned his fellow-conspirator against us, the one who makes profiteering possible. I mean the domestic servant."

Mrs. Jenks cast a quick glance round. This was a phase of the discussion she hadn't contemplated. There was a buzz of expectancy. Many ladies put their fans to their faces, but Mrs. Craddock only smiled grimly.



"What I can't understand," broke in Morrisey—also army soups—with great feeling, "is why we want so many of 'em. I can't come home at night without treading on the toes of some of these elegant ladies and gentlemen. I'd like to feel that there's a niche somewhere in my home that I can call my own."

Morrisey paused dramatically. There was a dead silence. Army Soups Morrisey had touched on the one sensitive point—the servant question. All the men present hated liveried servants. All the women adored them. A superfluity of servants was the one indulgence the new millionaires had granted their wives unquestioningly. But in their hearts they rebelled.

"You'll pardon me if I speak feelingly," Army Soups went on, "but I am a business man. My office, thanks to my chief clerk, is a model of efficiency and economy of effort, and it grates on me to witness the appalling waste of energy in various households."

"I admit we've got to eat," Canned Beans Henderson went on as Army Soups

Morrissey sat down, "and so we must submit to the profiteering propensities of tradesmen. But we don't have to be fed like babies in long clothes. I for one have not got so fashionable that I can't put on my own breeches nor so fat that I can't lace my own shoes"—glancing at Flabby Briggs.

Mrs. Henderson made as if to arrest her husband's talk, but thought better of it, for Canned Beans was a true Scot. He would not be dictated to by his wife—in public.

"Hear! Hear!" cried Jimmy Dooling.

Again Annabelle Howe raised high a beautifully jeweled protesting right hand, moving it a bit to promote scintillation.

"You mean we ought to let some of our servants go, Mr. Henderson? I only have—let me see—twelve."

"How's that, my dear?" exclaimed Mrs. Craddock. "Haven't you room in your home for any more?"

"What do you do with that many?" said Dooling. "How do you feed 'em?" "Where do you put 'em to sleep? It seems

to me that some of you folks keep huge establishments just to give servants room and bath and board, and you pay 'em for enjoying it. They ought to pay you. You're prisoners. They're your jailers."

"Servants are an awful care. Mr. Dooling's right," exclaimed Mrs. Socks Baron. "When I shop I really have to consider them quite as much as I do my family or my guests."

Dooling looked over his shoulder to see that the bearers of cups and sugar-tongs were well out of the way.

"Yes, by all means give 'em the best—the very best," he emphasized. "A friend of mine in Boston had a wonderful escape that way. He used to get all his milk from a certain certified dairy. He attempted the archaic game of giving his servants a standard quality of milk, but not the extra quality he gave his family. Suddenly an epidemic broke out among the servants, but the family didn't get it. The trouble was traced to the certified dairy." He paused, then, "The servants had been swapping milk with the family."

Little Mrs. Undershirts Billings had her eye on Mrs. Colby.

"I admit it costs a great deal to feed them, but, even so, I couldn't dispense with one of mine—I only have eleven. I have to pay them whatever they demand"—she made an appealing gesture—"but what am I going to do about it?"

"That's not wise talk," commented Mrs. Colby to Skinner behind her fan. "Servants have ears, very large ears, capable of catching the smallest sound."

"It wouldn't cost so much to feed your eleven servants, Mrs. Billings, if they didn't stand in with the profiteers," Canned Beans observed.

"The idea!" protested Mamie King, the stout one of the four daughters of William King—also army shoes—who was sweating to maintain them in idleness. "If we bounce any of our servants we'll have to do the work ourselves."

"You've no idea how it would add to your beauty, my dear, if you did some of the housework," said Mrs. Craddock. "Not that you aren't beautiful enough as you

are, but a slight reduction of embonpoint, you know—”

The spirited young woman was about to retort, but her mother kicked her foot. Old lady Craddock was a dangerous person to engage. She had a way of speaking right out in meeting. And the Kings didn't have an unassailable reputation.

“Why not let a few of our servants go? We don't need so many,” Army Soups Morrissey urged.

“I guess not much!” said Mrs. Gas Masks Driggs to Mrs. Undershirts Smythe, under her breath. “Fred's made a lot of money and we're going to live as we always wanted to live.”

“Why don't you get up and say so? Speak right out!”

Thus backed up, Mrs. Gas Masks jumped to her feet.

“It's all right for you to talk about our letting some of our servants go and doing the menial work ourselves, Mr. Morrissey, but are you men good enough sports to help do the washing?”

“To be frank with you,” said Morrissey,

"I could do it if necessary. I did it many a time when Mary and I started out together and she had to look after the babies, and my back was all the stronger for the exercise it gave me."

Mrs. Morrisey was blushing blood red, her eyes downcast.

"What disgusting talk!" said Mrs. Undershirts Smythe to Mrs. Socks Baron under her fan.

"I really wish somebody 'd show me how I can dispense with any of my servants," Mrs. Gas Masks continued.

"How many have you, ma'am?" said Dooling.

"Let me see—I have only two chauffeurs and one assistant and a butler and only two footmen, and Jake's got to have his valet and I've got to have my maid, and to entertain as we do we must have at least two cooks and a scullery-maid, and our two laundresses are positively overworked, and I find my three housemaids have all they can do. You know what an establishment Jake insists on keeping up."

Several eyes were turned on Jake, who

sat in a corner. Jake neither confirmed nor denied. It was notorious among the men that Jake hated keeping up a show place.

"What do you pay 'em, ma'am?" said Dooling.

"Really, Mr. Dooling, my secretary attends to that."

A beautifully jeweled scintillating hand was again thrust into the air, followed by Annabelle Howe:

"I can give you some figures, Mr. Dooling. I pay my butler a hundred and fifty. I must, you know, for he sees to everything—he's perfectly indispensable—and I pay my cook a hundred and twenty-five, and—"

Here Mrs. Craddock interrupted. She rose, threw her head back, and puffed her stomach high into the air.

"That's sixty-five more than I paid her, my dear, and that fact throws some light on this very important question, Mr. Dooling." Turning again to Mrs. Howe: "I trained that cook of yours. I paid her sixty a month. A certain lady present bribed her away from me for a hundred a



month. It's clear she was bribed again. I don't sympathize with you, my dear. I know what I'm talking about. 'Most every good servant in this town was trained by me and seduced away by higher pay. If you women would only be loyal to one another and not go poaching on some one else's domestic preserves there wouldn't be all this fuss about high pay for servants. You've swelled their heads. That's what you've done—swelled their heads."

"Do you mind telling me how much you pay your chauffeur, Mrs. Howe?" said Dooling.

"Forty dollars a week, which is little enough for such a man."

"Ridiculous!" said Dooling. "You pay him too much. What's a chauffeur, anyhow? He never had to know as much as a coachman. Before the war he couldn't have earned fifteen dollars a week as a ditch-digger. The whole chauffeur game is a matter of capitalized impudence, and they put it over because we're all a lot of suckers."

"Don't include me in that, Mr. Dooling,"

said Mrs. Craddock. "I don't pay my chauffeur that much."

"No, but the one that gets him away from you will."

Mrs. Jenks raised her hand for silence, then said, very sweetly: "Now that we've discussed this question, pro and con, very thoroughly"—here Jimmy Dooling nudged his neighbor and chuckled—"I move that we select committees, one committee to investigate, another to consider reports, another—"

Mrs. Jim Biddle, watching, now caught Skinner's eye and Skinner nodded almost imperceptibly. That was the signal. Mrs. Jim was on her feet.

"It strikes me, Mrs. Jenks," said she, "that we've been rambling a good deal and haven't got anywhere."

Every one looked at Mrs. Jim Biddle. To the women the meeting was nothing but a social affair. But the men had hoped that something might come from it. But, after listening for a time to much vain-glorious babble, they had given up hope and had resigned themselves to silence for the

most part, now and then covertly glancing at their watches. But Mrs. Jim's words made them sit up. It was as if a lost cause had suddenly found a new advocate.

Obviously, something unpleasant was about to happen. Mrs. Jenks glanced anxiously at the lady from The Hill. If she could only shut the speaker off. But nobody'd ever been able to do that, once Mrs. Jim got started. As a matter of fact, it was for that very reason Skinner had selected the little lady as his spokesman. The hostess could only lift a protesting hand, hoping that Dooling would come to the rescue.

"Really, Mrs. Biddle, I think we have been discussing the question very intelligently."

Evidently Dooling didn't think so, for he didn't come to the rescue, and Mrs. Jim went on:

"We've been beating all about the bush, Mrs. Jenks, discussing this part of the question and that part of the question, but the most important part we haven't touched on at all."

"Hear! Hear!" cried Dooling.

Mrs. Colby put her lorgnette to her eyes and regarded Mrs. Jenks keenly. The speaker's chin was in the air. Her hat was in the ring.

"Why," she chuckled, contemptuously, "we've blamed the butcher and the grocer and the hatter and the clothier—we've called them profiteers and everything else that isn't flattering. We've even connected our servants with them—all of which may be right, for I hold no brief for any of them. But"—she flashed an accusing eye round—"who is it makes it possible for these people to profiteer and cheat? Who is it can check all the profiteering and cheating just by the exercise of a little bit of resolution?" She paused a moment; then, very sternly: "The one who holds the purse-strings—that's who—the consumer! How I hate that word 'consumer'; hate it even more than I do the word 'profiteer'—he's such a fool. Who are the consumers? We, rich and poor alike, and we're all of us fools. The rich are the more guilty because the more powerful." Mrs. Jim swung on the

left wing, where sat the gregarious poor. "But don't let us kid ourselves. Don't let us pass the buck to our more fortunate neighbor. We're all fools, every man jack of us. Why? Because we complain and whine and appeal for help from somewhere, somehow, about as intelligently as old Æsop's goggle-eyed frogs in the puddle that prayed into the vast spaces of the universe for a king. And yet we ourselves hold the key to the situation. Can you imagine bigger fools than that?"

Evidently no one could, for no one answered. Deep down in his heart Canned Beans Henderson began to feel a glow of warmth toward the little woman whom he'd always disliked. Nor was Jimmy Dooling in the habit of interrupting when things were coming his way.

Here Mrs. Jim directed her attention to Dooling, Henderson, Morrissey, Billings, *et al.*

"You shrewd business men complain about the increased salaries you have to pay your clerks, yet you are permitting your wives and daughters by their extrava-

gance to boost prices so high that those very clerks can't live without the raise they ask for. That's the kind of shrewd business men you are!"

Jimmy Dooling took his medicine like the good sport he was.

"By jingo! you're right, Mrs. Jim!"

"Of course I'm right. You all know it."

Mrs. Jim now turned her guns on the women.

"You women complain that you have to pay forty dollars for a hat and you go and buy four of 'em. Do you have to have four? That's the reason we who haven't got so much money can't have even one. It takes the involuntary denial of four women to supply a hat for one. Your excuse for paying outrageous prices for things—and then cornering the market on 'em—is that they're going higher. Of course they're going higher. The shopkeepers would be fools if they didn't go higher. Imagine a woman paying six hundred dollars for a fur piece, as I know they do, and exploiting it on the Avenue while anarchy stalks at her elbow!



“And you men—I’ve heard you complain that you have to pay a hundred dollars for a suit that you used to buy for forty or fifty, and ten dollars for a hat that used to cost five. Why is it? Curtailed production—that’s the answer. The big clothing-houses have plenty of material, but they can’t get it made up. Why?” Mrs. Jim brought one clenched fist into the palm of the other hand for emphasis. “Because you men don’t deny yourselves. You rush in and order clothes and hats and shoes you don’t really need, trying to overtake advancing prices, yet by your very acts keeping those prices ahead of you. You’re like the jackass that runs faster and faster, trying to catch up with the bag of oats that’s fastened just ahead of his nose. You’ll never overtake prices that way. The profiteer’ll see to that. You compel the clothiers to pay the absurd prices their workmen demand. You swell the poor devils’ heads by your extravagance. They never had such money before. And big money to them means big laziness. They simply won’t work.”



Once or twice Annabelle Howe had raised her scintillating hand high above her head in protest. But diamonds didn't count. Clubs were at the bat.

"And you women," Mrs. Jim went on, "complain about curtailed production. Yet by your very vanity you keep men from producing useful things. You fill your houses with able-bodied men bearing tea-trays and sugar-tongs, men who ought to be out raising wheat or cutting down trees or making shoes. The practice is an offense against patriotism these times." She paused. "What's come over you women? Why don't you go to your own front doors once in a while with a glad hand when you see an old neighbor coming up the path, like you used to do? Why," she laughed, "if I had a million dollars I wouldn't give up the fun of doing that. 'Hello, Mrs. Howe! Come right in. Glad to see you! How's Billy B.?' That's the sort of thing that makes life worth living."

"Hear! Hear!" cried Canned Beans Henderson. "That's the stuff!" But Mrs. Jim didn't notice the interruption.

"You women complain about the wages you have to pay your servants and the bonuses you have to pay 'em to get 'em to stay in when it's their night off. Why do you have to pay 'em such wages? Why do you have to pay 'em such bonuses? Because you've taken 'em away from one another. You've paid 'em higher wages to get 'em. You've bribed 'em. You've swelled their heads. And yet you complain." Mrs. Jim threw back her head and laughed. "Why, ladies, you know as well as I do that your talk about expensive servants is only a boast camouflaged as a complaint." She paused, then to mark a change: "The trouble is you ladies are playing with a dangerous toy—new money. Why don't you get somebody that's always had money to teach you how to spend it?" Here she looked pointedly at Mrs. Colby. "You ought to. You're endangering the whole country by your riotous exploitation of new money."

Mrs. Jim paused and looked round, as if expecting a challenge.

"And now, Mrs. Biddle," Annabelle

Howe spoke up, "that you have enlightened us consumers, now that we know we are fools, now that we know that we are endangering the whole country, won't you kindly tell us how to remedy it?"

Mrs. Jim was superior to the gentle irony.

"Not one of you can remedy it all, Annabelle, but every one of you can do your bit. It's the easiest thing in the world—so obvious that I'm almost ashamed to suggest it. It's this: Use the shrewd wits you used to use when you didn't have quite so much money, when you used to do your own work, when you used to go to your own front door when you saw a neighbor coming up the path. Use the wits you were compelled to use when necessity stood at your elbow."

Mrs. Jim sat down. For a moment there was silence. But the air was charged with resentment. Then began a buzzing, an antagonistic, an acrimonious buzzing behind fans held to cover the mouths of the speakers and the ears of the listeners. Mrs. Jenks sensed the general sentiment. It would be useless to try to formulate any

program of procedure now. Nor did the other ladies wait, so the meeting broke up.

Apologetic, Mrs. Jenks immediately crossed to the lady from The Hill.

"I can't tell you how disturbed I am, Mrs. Colby. Mrs. Biddle—"

Mrs. Colby put her hand on her hostess's arm. "I found it wonderfully interesting. Mrs. Biddle's clever. The whole thing's been a regular education to me."

"Dearie, I'm so disappointed, so disgusted," said Honey to Skinner when they reached home.

"Why disgusted, Honey?"

"The whole thing. Such a fine start, everybody interested, and then Mrs. Jim Biddle queered it all."

"Queered it all?"

"It was your affair—this meeting. Why didn't you get up and head her off when you saw how things were going?"

Skinner chuckled. "Head Mrs. Jim off?"

"Worst of all, she seemed to be directing her remarks right at Mrs. Colby as if she had a spite against her. Everybody noticed it."

"Who knows? Perhaps she was. Perhaps she had. What if they did?" Skinner commented.

"Why, when she said some one ought to teach those people how to spend their money she almost shouted it in Mrs. Colby's face. It was dreadful!"

"She had to shout it in somebody's face in a meeting like that—unless she'd whirled as she talked, which would have destroyed the effect of her words."

"Silly!"

Skinner chuckled at the picture his words had conjured of the burlesque effect of the fiery little Mrs. Jim doing the teetotum act and showering the party with her sparks like a centrifugal sprinkler.

"Silly!" Honey repeated. "But that wasn't the worst of it," she went on. "They were about to form committees."

"You mean that was the worst of it?"

"No, silly, they were just about to do something."

"Don't worry," Skinner said. "There are things more effective than committees."

6 "And since Mrs. Jim made such a fizzle

out of your meeting, what is your next step?"

"I don't know that I have any next step."

Honey looked surprised.

"My experience has taught me that in great matters like this the only thing any one man can do is to start the ball rolling. No man can control it after it has started, or direct its course. No sensible man tries to. It's a curious thing," Skinner philosophized. "The course from cause to effect is often most erratic, wholly un contemplated by the originator. You start a big ball rolling down hill. The objective is the bottom of the hill. That ball won't roll in a straight line. It 'll strike a rock here and be deflected from its course, and it 'll strike a tree there and be deflected back again. But it 'll keep on going in the right general direction. And, Honey, it 'll get to the bottom of the hill. You see if it doesn't. All you've got to do is start it. I believe I've started the ball rolling—started it rolling in the right direction."

Honey looked at Skinner shrewdly for a few moments, then her face brightened.

"I know why you're so calm, so philosophical. When you're philosophical you always have something up your sleeve. This meeting wasn't a fizzle. Mrs. Jim was directing her remarks at Mrs. Colby."

"Uh-huh."

"You old dear! You did it all. You told her to, didn't you?"

"Uh-huh."

"You told her what to say, didn't you?"

"Uh-huh."

Honey clapped her hands. "I know now why you asked Mrs. Colby to the meeting."

"So long as you know so much, why?"

"She's the keystone to the arch, isn't she—the arch you told me about?"

"Uh-huh."

"And what she does the others 'll do, because they've all got their eyes on her all the time."

"Uh-huh."

"I know. They think she must be a great spender because of her money and her family, and they're trying to keep up with her just to curry favor with her."

"Uh-huh."



"And that's what sustains the arch of the high cost of living."

Skinner patted Honey's cheek fondly. "Honey, you know what happens to the arch when you knock the keystone out?"

She laughed gleefully. "The whole thing collapses," she cried. "Doesn't it?"

"Uh-huh."

While many persons were complaining that the whole Jenks meeting had proved a fizzle, due to the scolding methods of Mrs. Jim Biddle, certain unlooked-for, very definite results were taking place in two diametrically opposite quarters.

"Well, Sally," said Stephen Colby, when the lady from The Hill got back from the Jenkses' meeting, "how about it?"

"I was somewhat disappointed, Stephen."

"How's that?"

"I had thought these people sincere. I'd thought they really wanted to do something about correcting conditions. But really, Stephen, it seemed as if they'd come there just to see me."

"Snob," laughed Colby.

"Not at all, Stephen. I had hoped to be

an unobserved observer, but I couldn't escape. They all seemed to be directing their talk at me from the very start, trying to impress me. But, most absurd of all, they bragged about their riotous way of living."

"Bragged, my dear?"

"Complained in a peculiarly feminine, appealing, plaintive, piquant way—a way designed not to gain sympathy, but to exploit big money, to promote envy."

"Bad as all that, Sally?"

"They expected me to applaud that sort of thing. Applaud," the lady repeated, then burst out, vehemently: "Stephen, I was amazed at the way those women talked. It was a revelation. The people here are indulging in nothing short of criminal extravagance, right here in Meadeville, under our very noses. And it's this riot of extravagance that's to blame for the riot of profiteering that's going on."

"I suspected it," said Colby. "But what can one do about it?"

"Stephen, I was fortunate enough to have a grandmother and a mother who

were trained in the art of spending money economically, effectively."

"True, my dear."

"Frankly, Stephen, little Mrs. Jim Bidle made me feel as if I were to blame."

"Nonsense! You don't spend money that way. We live very quietly."

"But they don't know that."

"How you going to show 'em? Invite 'em up here to live and observe us?"

"No; there's another way." Mrs. Colby hesitated, toyed with her fan nervously for a few moments, then sprung it: "Stephen, I'm going to be game enough to open our front door myself when I see an old neighbor coming up the path."

Colby pursed his lips and raised his eyebrows in a surprised, questioning way.

"I'm going to let Jacques go."

"No butler, Sally?"

"No butler and no second man, Stephen. They should be doing something more useful than carrying tea-trays and sugar-tongs these times."

Colby chuckled. "Did little Mrs. Jim tell you that, Sally? I always knew she was a

firebrand, but I didn't think she could set you on fire."

"Well, she has. Stephen, the present condition is a menace to the welfare of the whole country. I'm going to show the people here in Meadeville that we whose ancestors fought for this country love this country above everything else." Mrs. Colby paused; then, "Are you game, too, Stephen?"

Colby was a man who thought slowly and spoke slowly, and what Colby said he meant. He puffed his cigar, glanced here, glanced there, looked at the ceiling, then at the blotter on his desk, then: "Yes, Sally, I am. I'm game enough to let Luigi go and leave the cars in the garage. Or, hang it! I can drive my own car!"

Luigi had that very afternoon struck Colby for another raise. But Colby didn't mention that fact to his wife.

There's an old chestnut to the effect that the same thing affects different persons differently. The effect of the irresponsible talk at the Jenks meeting was to rouse in Mrs. Colby a public-spirited interest, to

suggest to her an opportunity for patriotic self-denial, an opportunity for service. To the Bolshevistic Binns, the Jenkses' butler, the selfsame irresponsible talk suggested nothing but an opportunity for graft. And this relates to what was taking place in the servants' hall down-stairs while the meeting called to bring about the reduction of the high cost of living was going on up-stairs.

While Binns and the second man were circling among the guests with imperturbable mien or hovering round outside, their large and gossip-sensitive ears were taking in everything, however minute, that was going on. So it chanced that bits of talk bearing on the servant question, but not meant for publication, were gathered and stored away for future reference by the gentlemen in livery.

The Bolshevistic Binns, a bit later in the servants' hall, faced a group of rubicund, cream-fed confrères—butlers, second men, cooks, scullery-maids, and chauffeurs—who had been advised by servants' wireless of the purpose of the meeting and had gathered from the various mansions of the war

rich thereabouts. Binns held up his hand, enjoining silence.

"My word! ladies and gentlemen, I've 'eard a bit up-stairs! 'Aven't we, Mr. Betts?"

"What did you hear, Mr. Binns?" said Jenny Brackett, a Craddock graduate and later handmaiden to Mrs. Socks Baron Stein.

"What did I 'ear? I 'eard something as 'd open the eyes of all of you. Didn't we, Mr. Betts?"

"Abusin' us, as usual, Mr. Binns?" said Becker, Annabelle Howe's forty-dollar quite-indispensable chauffeur.

"Abusin' us? I guess not!" Binns paused, looked all round. "They was a-sayin' as 'ow we didn't get our rights."

The cream-fed ones looked from one to the other in perplexed silence for a moment. Then, "You mean as how they didn't get their rights, Mr. Binns?" corrected Jenny Brackett.

"Pardon me, Miss Brackett, but I guess as 'ow I know 'ow to speak the English language correct, even if you folks 'ere doesn't. I said 'we,' not 'they.'"



"I've always got my rights," broke in old Maggie Platt, nurse in general to the Morrisey babies. Maggie had started in as maid-of-all-work at the Morrisseys' in the good old days when servants were called "help" and the mistress of the house wasn't above doing a turn at kitchen work.

"But what can you say when they admits it theirselves as they just done upstairs? I might even say as 'ow they bragged about it."

"I don't see anything very strange in what you say, Mr. Binns," said Maggie Platt. "Everybody brags in their place. What about it, anyway? What are you drivin' at? Suppos'n' they do brag?"

"What about it?" sneered the Bolshévistic Binns, sensing insubordination. "What about it? Now's our 'arvest-time. That's what about it."

"Harvest-time for what, Mr. Binns?" insisted Maggie.

"'Arvest-time for what? Well, some people is slow, ain't they, now? 'Arvest-time for more money, Maggie Platt. That's what. Everybody else is gettin' it."



"You're right, Mr. Binns," said Becker the indispensable. "They pay it to the grocer and the butcher. Let 'em pay those fellers less and then we'll get somewhere near our dues."

For obvious reasons Binns didn't press that particular point.

Old Peggy Watson's loyalty to Honey Skinner, whom she loved like a daughter, forbade further silence. She slowly rose, adjusted her little black hat, and pulled her shawl close about her shoulders.

"But, Mr. Binns," she urged, in a quiet little voice, "now that everybody else is bleeding 'em, ain't this the time for us to hold back?"

"Ha!" laughed Binns. "Ha! ha! If that isn't logic for you! Don't tackle 'em when they're down an' 'elpless, say you! Wait till they gets independent! I like that!"

The laughter that followed Binns's sarcasm squelched Peggy. She subsided into her chair, silenced but not converted.

The derision aimed at her old confrère angered Mary McCann, up-stairs maid at the Hendersons'.

"I don't like the way you talk, Mr. Binns." Mary wouldn't have liked the way he talked if he'd been an angel, for Binns was an Englishman. "I—"

Binns shut her off. "Now look 'ere, Mary McCann! You're out of order with this meetin', an' what's more, you're 'ypnotized, you are. I know what you're goin' to say. You're goin' to say as 'ow your mistress 'as taken care of you when you was sick an' all that kind of twaddle as I've 'eard till my ears ached. Of course she 'as. It was cheaper to do that an' get your good will than to let you go die on 'er 'ands. My, but 'asn't she pulled the wool over your eyes? My word!"

"My mistress loves me and so does all the young uns. I know it, Mr. Binns, in spite of all you say," urged Maggie Platt.

"Just you go to 'er and ask 'er for more money. That 'll show you 'ow much she loves you, my dear."

Such cynicism was repugnant to Mary McCann; coming from Binns, doubly repugnant. She jumped to her feet.

"What do I care about you and your newfangled notions, Mr. Binns? I've got a good mistress. She's been kind to me, not because she's afraid I'm going to die on her hands, as you say, but because she loves me. It ain't a matter of money. It's a matter of kindness and love I owe her. I'll not stay and listen to any more of your Bolshevist talk, Mr. Binns. You may go to the devil—and good night to you."

Out Mary marched, lifting her skirts as if to escape contamination as she did so, and trailed by old Peggy Watson, Maggie Platt, Delia McCarthy, and the others of the old loyals.

Binns waited until the last of the conspicuous loyals had closed the door behind her.

"Let 'em go!" he shouted. "We're well rid of 'em. Them's the kind as stands in the way of progress. Don't know their rights an' is insulted when you tell 'em." He paused. "Do you ladies and gentlemen realize we're the only ones round 'ere that 'asn't struck? The carpenters 'as struck, an' so 'as the plumbers an' so 'as the milk-

drivers. Even the grave-diggers 'as struck. Everybody's struck but us. An' we're the most important of the lot, we are. Why? Because those bloomin' nobodies up-stairs couldn't run their grand 'ouses without us. They don't know 'ow, any of 'em, except the lady from The 'Ill and that old lady with the false bang and the 'igh stomach. They 'as to 'ave us. Didn't they say so up-stairs a minute ago?"

"They did, Mr. Binns?" said Hicks, Driggs's butler. "They said that?"

"Did they? Why, they was 'orrified, positively 'orrified at the mere idea of lettin' any of us go, I'm tellin' you! Scared to death, my dears. Didn't they admit as much? An' they admitted as 'ow they wasn't payin' us enough, too. That's why I say we're fools, we are; we're suckers, we are; we're ijits, we are."

"Admitted that, Mr. Binns?" said Mary Dugan—"Greedy Mary," so called—cook for the socks baron, her eyes narrowing.

"Admitted as 'ow they'd pay us more rather than let any of us go. Don't that mean they ain't payin' us enough now?"

Don't you see that's a message they give us without meanin' to?"

Thus it was shown by Binns's words that some of the irresponsible ladies up-stairs, like many men before them, had been digging their graves with their tongues.

"But I don't understand, Mr. Binns," Mary persisted. "They really said that?"

"Of course they did! I know what I'm talkin' about. I 'eard what they said an' so did Mr. Betts, what was standin' right behind me, listenin', 'ear it, too."

"Course I did," Betts corroborated.

"And didn't I 'ear Mrs. Nichols say to old Money Bags Doolin'—didn't I 'ear 'er say, 'I assure you my butler's quite indispensable'? That's what I 'eard 'er say." Binns lifted his hands for emphasis. "And I 'eard 'er say, 'Really 'e's worth twice what I pay 'im.'" He looked at Betts for confirmation and, getting it, went on: "And our lady up-stairs, I 'eard 'er say, 'I trust my servants absolutely.' That's the 'igh esteem in which they 'old us, and we'll show 'em as 'ow we appreciates it by askin' for more money."

"And they said all that?" Mary Dugan muttered to herself, and relapsed into meditative silence.

"An', what's more," Binns went on, "I 'eard Mrs. 'Owe, Mrs. Annabelle 'Owe, the lady with the white 'ands that she's always stickin' up to show off her rings—I 'eard her say, 'I pay my butler a 'undred and fifty.' Now mark this! Says she, 'I must, you know, 'cause he sees to everything; 'e's perfectly indispensable.' You know what 'indispensable' means, my dears? It means they can't get along without us. 'An', said she, 'I pay my cook a 'undred and twenty-five.' Do you 'ear that, Mary Dugan? A 'undred and twenty-five, an' you only get a 'undred." Binns paused. "Don't that cinch it? One admits as 'ow she can't get along without us, an' another admits as 'ow she don't pay us 'alf enough. Ain't we the suckers, 'earin' all that an' still submittin' to it?"

"But what excuse have we for askin' for more money, Mr. Binns?" said Hicks.

"What excuse 'as we?" shouted Binns, who up-stairs was little more than an obse-



quious semi-animated statue with big ears, but now a roaring firebrand. "My word! 'Cause we wants it. That's what excuse we 'as. Ain't that enough, Mr. 'Icks? Some other feller 'ad it an' these folks upstairs wanted it an' they went an' took it. Now they 'as it an' we want it. Ain't that logic? Ain't it?"

"Suppose they won't give it, Mr. Binns?" said the greedy but cautious Bailey, Henderson's second man.

"Won't give it? 'Aven't you ears? 'Aven't you been listenin' to what I've been tellin' you? They've gone mad over this social game. An' what's society for but to furnish opportunities for folks like us? Now's the time, I tell you, while the iron's 'ot."

"What's your plan, Mr. Binns?" said Hicks.

"My idea is that us butlers take the first step."

This met with enthusiastic approval, the other servants not being loath to letting the butlers take the initiative and bear the brunt of what might follow.



"Now," said Binns, "if all but the butlers will retire and let us 'ave this room?"

The hint was sufficient. The meeting broke up. When they were alone Binns turned to his confrères.

"Gentlemen," said he, "the wise man strikes at the hoppertune moment. Now's the time for action. The lady up-stairs is to give her grand affair on the night of the eighth. The answer is, we strike at eight o'clock on the evening of the seventh. We give 'em an hultimatum of twelve hours—twelve hours—that won't look like no 'old-up an' it won't give 'em time to get other 'elp to come out 'ere an' take our places, which I doubts as 'ow they can't get any-'ow, an' which I also doubts as 'ow they wouldn't be willin' to take them as what they could get. Don't you ask for no answer till I gets mine. Just as soon as the lady up-stairs agrees to my terms I'll 'phone to Mr. 'Icks an' that'll stiffen your backs in case any of your folks should be stubborn. They'll all be dyin' to give in, but their dander'll 'old 'em back. An' just as soon as you can tell 'em Mrs. Jenks 'as give

in they'll fall like a lot of ninepins. An', gentlemen, if they should 'old out against us butlers we 'as the biggest weapons of all in our 'ands. You know—we'll call out the rest of the ladies and gentlemen at twelve o'clock."

And so it was agreed.

Within seven days from the time William Manning Skinner determined to set the town of Meadeville by the ears in a sensational way the ultimatum of the butlers, an absolutely direct and logical but wholly unlooked-for result of the machinations of aforesaid Skinner on aforesaid evening, did set the town of Meadeville by the ears in a sensational way. The first explosion took place at the Jenkses' a few minutes after eight on the evening of the seventh. Explosions of more or less violence took place simultaneously at other dinner-tables throughout Meadeville at a few minutes after eight. The Jenkses' explosion was typical of the others.

Jenks waited until Binns had retired. Then he raised his clenched hands in the

air. This was a storm signal, for Jenks, the mild-mannered burden-bearer, rarely gave way to wrath.

"Now please be calm, Dick," Fanny adjured.

The words were like a dash of petroleum on a fire.

"Calm!" shrieked Jenks. "Am I going to be calm till I bust? Am I going to keep on being calm all my life, under all conditions? Can't I have the luxury of busting out once in a while, getting mad, swearing? Binns can blackmail, because he holds the cards, and you can be hysterical and the whole world can rage and storm, but I, Jenks, must be calm! Calm!" he groaned.

"But, Dick," Fanny pleaded, "what's the use in going on like that? We must give in just this once—we've got to."

"That's what you said the last time, Fanny, and I did give in. Am I going to go through life giving in—giving in?" There was an agony of wrath in the way Jenks ground out the words between set teeth. "Is nobody ever going to give in to me? Hang it! it's worse than being calm!"

"'Sh-h, Dick! Don't raise your voice!"

Jenks glanced sidewise at the door through which Binns had made a silent but exultant exit after having cast the shot.

"Oh, I know—big ears! Well, let him hear!"

The first fury of Jenks's temper had spent itself like a sudden thunder-squall. He settled down in his chair.

"Go on," he said, calmly.

"Now, Dick," said Fanny, "it's unfortunate, but there's no two ways about it. The affair to-morrow night will be the biggest thing I've ever done. Dick, think of it—the prestige I got from Mrs. Colby!"

"I wish to hell she'd never come!"

"And now, after all that and what I've been through to get it, think of my having a reception without any butler! Preposterous!"

"Ugh!" groaned Jenks, twisting in his chair.

"This is going to be the most brilliant social season Meadeville has ever had, Dick. All sorts of things are planned out to my certain knowledge. You don't sup-

pose Mrs. Stein or Mrs. Henderson or Mrs. Billings or Mrs. Driggs or Mrs. Howe would let a matter of pique or a few dollars more stand in their way?"

"Ugh!" barked Jenks. "You women are slaves to vanity, slaves to ambition." Then, pleadingly: "Hang it all, Fanny, don't you ever think of me, your old running mate, the burden-bearer of this outfit? You know how I like quiet, simplicity—how I love to get into a little nook to read. But after a hard day's work I come home and have to put on these newfangled airs and do these newfangled things that bore me. Gad! I wish I could go to some place in the Rocky Mountains and stay there for a year and be quiet like I used to! Fanny, I'm tired of it all. I want a rest. So does every other man in Meadeville. We're all sick of it. We all hate these falderals."

"Well, Dick," said Fanny, finally, "I don't know what I'm going to do about it. The invitations are all sent out. You wouldn't make me a laughing-stock of all Meadeville, would you, Dick?"

"No, Fanny, I wouldn't. Do as you

please. But I really don't know where it's all going to end."

And that was typical of the way every good man and true of the Meadeville war-rich set rebelliously capitulated. What happened in the various households of Meadeville when the various ultimatums were delivered was faithfully reported at a gathering of the butlers the same evening in the servants' hall at the Morrisseys'.

Said Benson: "My missus offered me a bonus to hold off for a couple of weeks. She was afraid to tell the gov'nor."

"My missus offered me a bonus to wait till the gov'nor got back from Chicago," laughed Crookes.

"And what did Mr. Skinner say, Stebbins?" Binns asked.

"Said he: 'Stebbins, why do you strike just now? What put it into your head?' And I said, 'It was that meetin' held at the Jenkses' the other night.' 'The meetin' held to reduce the high cost of living?' said he. 'Yes,' said I. He seemed surprised, then he burst out laughing—insolent like. 'You butlers consider yourselves indispensa-



ble, don't you?" said he. 'To be frank with you, we do,' said I. 'Well, you're not,' said he. 'Stebbins, take my advice—stay where you are. Cut out all this talk about higher wages.'"

"Oh, he did, did he?" said Binns. "Well, don't you worry, Mr. Stebbins. We 'as a rod in pickle for that Mr. Skinner of yours. 'E'll laugh on the other side of his face when we gets through with him.'"

There was a chorus of, "You bet he will!"

"An' now let me tell you about the lady at our 'ouse." He lowered his voice. "She was flabbergasted—simply flabbergasted. Said she to me: 'Why, Binns, you know to-morrow night is my big reception. Don't you think you're takin' an unfair advantage?' 'No, ma'am,' said I, without crackin' a smile. 'No, ma'am,' said I, 'cause can't you get other servants from town?' 'Impossible,' said she. Then she pleaded with me to stay, fairly begged me to stay, offered me a bigger bonus. But I was firm, I was. I wasn't goin' to be took in by no such bait as that."

"I take off my hat to you, Mr. Binns.



We've got you to thank for this," said Hicks.

There was a chorus of, "Yes, so we have," and much wagging of heads and appreciative nods.

"You bet you 'as, gentlemen," said Binns, puffing out his chest. "I don't like to brag, but if it 'adn't been for me you fellows never would 'ave woke up to your rights. An', what's more, I've 'ad experience, gentlemen. I know enough to strike when the iron's 'ot. Look at the way they took our hultimatum! 'Ain't I proved it?"

After much further felicitation, of which Binns was the object, and many expressions of mutual admiration, the meeting broke up.

Breakfast-time at the Jenkses' next morning found the lady of the house in a state of hysterical but rebellious submission. She had slept little. Until long into the night Fanny and Dick had talked servants, nothing but servants. Jenks had cursed his own servants in particular and had uttered a vast blanket curse to cover all servants in general. He had cursed the new fads of women that had made the thing indispen-

sable; he had cursed the big party his wife was to give that had put it into the hands of Binns to humiliate him, Jenks—make him eat crow—for he felt that Binns hated him, even as he hated Binns. In brief, Jenks had done enough cursing in a few short hours to damn the souls of a regiment for all eternity.

Presently the door opened and Binns—more suave than usual—pussyfooted in with the morning papers and mail, which the carrier had just left at the front door. Never before had Jenks felt so gallingly humiliated. Never had he so longed for a chance to tell this fat-lipped flunky a thing or two and then kick him in the bulging calves. Jenks hated those bulging calves. It was the thing about Binns he hated most of all. Binns laid the New York papers on the table at Jenks's right and then passed to the other end of the table and quietly put down some letters and the despised Meadeville *Morning Star*. This done, Binns stepped back a few paces and waited, a look of calm assurance in his eyes. This was an important moment for

Binns. He glanced sidewise at the clock. In two minutes he would flash the news of the capitulation of the man he hated to the waiting Hicks. The lady of the house tossed aside letters bearing tradesmen's names, hastily glanced over a social note, and then picked up *The Star*.

"Ahem!" said Binns, impatient to flash the news to the waiting Hicks. "I beg pardon, ma'am."

But Mrs. Jenks's eyes had been caught by a glaring head-line—one that might have caught Binns's eyes had the despised sheet not been folded inside of the metropolitan paper.

"Oh yes, Binns," she smiled sweetly. "Just a moment. There's an item here I want to read to Mr. Jenks."

Binns was indulgent. "Of course, ma'am—very good, ma'am."

"What is it, Fanny?" growled Jenks, looking up from *The Times's* financial page.

Fanny paused, then read, very distinctly:

"Mrs. Stephen Colby on The Hill dismisses her butler, her second man, and her chauffeur."

"Hey? What's that, Fanny?"

Fanny, reading:

"Mrs. Stephen Colby on The Hill dismisses her butler, her second man, and her chauffeur."

Jenks dropped his paper to the floor and glanced sidewise at Binns. A marked change had come into that gentleman's face. He was decidedly less ruddy. The indulgent smile was gone. Binns was wetting his lips with his tongue. Clearly Binns was interested.

"Go on, Fanny. Read it."

And Fanny read:

"To a reporter of *The Star* Mrs. Colby said: 'The dismissal of my butler, second man, and chauffeur has nothing to do with the strike, as you suggest, nor does it reflect in any way on the character of these men. Mr. Colby and I had decided upon such a course some time before the butlers of Meadeville made a demand for higher wages.'

"When and how did you happen to decide on such a course, Mrs. Colby?"

"I first came to realize the seriousness of the situation at the meeting held at Mr. and Mrs. Richard Jenkses' on Wednesday last—the meeting

called to discuss the high cost of living. Mr. Colby and I felt that as wages were so high there must be a shortage of labor; that it was because of such shortage production of the necessities of life had been restricted and the cost of living put up—put up on persons less favored by good luck than ourselves. We felt that we could not consistently maintain in positions of comparative idleness three able-bodied men who would better be doing something to increase production. I was made to feel at the meeting at Mrs. Jenks's that this is the time to retrench instead of contributing in any way to the high cost of living; that it was my patriotic duty to do so.'

"Are you going to retrench further than in the matter of servants?"

"Decidedly! Mr. Colby and I feel that it is our duty as citizens to simplify our manner of living. For instance, simpler table, simpler dress, which means,' Mrs. Colby laughed, 'having perfectly good garments done over instead of buying new ones; simpler amusements, and so on.'

"How long shall you keep this up, Mrs. Colby?"

"At the moment I would say until this crisis is past—till things get back to the normal.' Mrs. Colby smiled. 'One can't tell, you know. The simple life has always had much charm for me.'"

Jenks was silent for a moment. So was Binns.

"Well, Fanny, what do you think of it?"

"She mentioned me twice, Dick." Fanny's eyes were full of exultation. She could imagine every other woman in Meadeville reading the interview, and noting the number of times the Jenkses' name was mentioned by The Hill aristocrat. "Twice, Dick! What do you think of that?"

But Jenks was thinking of something else. A wonderful calm had come into Jenks's soul.

"Fanny," he said, quietly, "Binns is waiting."

"Oh yes!" Mrs. Jenks turned. "Oh yes, Binns, I see! It's eight o'clock." She paused, knitting her brows, then, very sweetly, "Binns, Mr. Jenks and I have decided"—an agonizing instant for Binns—"to let you go."

Binns shut his eyes, then opened them wide. He was really awake.

"Yes, ma'am," he said, almost in a whisper. "Yes, ma'am."

And there was something in Binns's face just then that would have made Jenks forbear to kick him in the bulging calves, even

if he'd had an opportunity. Binns pussy-footed out and closed the door.

At the top of the stairs leading to the basement Binns halted. It was a test of moral courage, what he had to do. Binns was not at heart a sinful man, but for a moment he fervently wished that Hicks might be dead when he should call him up. But Hicks was not dead. Hicks was very much alive and waiting.

"Mornin', Mr. 'Icks. 'Ave you seen the mornin' paper? I mean that narsty little Meadeville rag? You 'ave? I'm glad. Then you know." (A pause.) "Why, what could the missus say after that? That old lady on The 'Ill's like a queen issuing a royal edict." (A long pause.) "That's right, blime me! It warn't my fault. It's the fault of Mrs. Colby." (A pause.) "What's that? What do you say, Mr. 'Icks?" (A pause.) "Go to 'ell your own self! 'Ow did I know the old lady on The 'Ill was goin' to act that narsty?" (Another pause.) "What? What's that? I'd like to see you in 'ell, too, you ungrateful beast!"



Binns slammed up the receiver, shutting off responsive anathema from Hicks.

At twelve o'clock precisely the same day each and every mistress of a grand establishment in Meadeville was waited on by a committee of one—the cook. Each lady was notified by said cook, after a more or less incoherent preamble, that unless said lady saw fit to reinstate the butler she, the cook, the up-stairs girl, the scullery-maids, and the chauffeur—in fact the whole kitchen and up-stairs outfit, with the exception of old Peggy, who didn't know her rights and hadn't any sense anyhow—would quit forthwith. The answer the Morrisey cook received was typical of all the others:

“Get out! Vamoose, the whole kit and caboodle of you! I don't care! I'm sick and tired of you all and your absurd airs!”

And they did vamoose, the whole kit and caboodle of them. They went—and in their wake was no mourning.

No sooner had the exodus of cooks, up-stairs girls, scullery-maids, and chauffeurs taken place than the Jenkses' telephone bell was seized with a violent ringing. Every

war-rich woman of Meadeville was on the wire. Each telephonic dialogue began with, "Of course you'll have to call off the reception, Mrs. Jenks," and ended with: "Of course I'll not have to call it off. Dick's staying home from business to help out, and I've still got Mary left—the dear faithful old sensible. And I guess I haven't forgotten how to open my own front door when I see an old neighbor coming up the path."

In all the history of Meadeville there never was such a party as the Jenkses gave that night. To begin with, the lady opened the front door herself and welcomed her guests, giving each one the glad hand in the good old-fashioned way, the way they all loved but were ashamed to own it.

Her first words were: "You must excuse Dick. He's down in the kitchen helping Mary."

And Canned Beans Henderson responded: "Praise be to the Lord! This is a joyous occasion."

Then Canned Beans collared Jimmy Dooling and got him into a remote and obscure

corner and pulled out a great flask from his hip pocket—his own hip pocket.

“Have a wee nipie from my private store in honor of our liberation,” said he. “Don’t peach or Uncle Sam ’ll get after me for transportin’ it.” Then, after an awful five seconds: “Hoot, mon! I didna’ ask you to get drunk on it. Have a heart! Morrisey’s here, and so is Billings.”

“Don’t worry,” said Dooling. “They all have one.”

He turned and lifted his coat tails and patted a bulging pocket.

“Scoundrel! Sneak!” said Canned Beans.

By nine o’clock all the emancipated ones of Meadeville had arrived. The hostess, never more radiant, threaded her way among her guests, assigning to them various duties. She beckoned Jimmy Dooling.

“You’re to preside at the buffet, Mr. Dooling. I want you to do the carving.”

Said Dooling, “In that case you needn’t worry whether you have much or little beef, for I can juggle with a carving-knife all right.”

Flabby Briggs, Army Soups Morrisey,

and Socks Baron Stein were assigned to help Dick bring up the goodies from the kitchen at the proper time and act as waiters. W. Bentinck Bentinck and Washington Irving Pelham were made general roustabouts to look after the grate fires, fetch and carry chairs, and the like.

But lo, and behold! In the midst of Mrs. Jenks's activities the telephone rang. W. Bentinck Bentinck, who was standing near the instrument, answered. Quite naturally there was a general hush, for every one likes to listen to a telephone conversation. Bentinck's words electrified the party:

"Oh yes, Mrs. Colby. . . . Yes. . . . Good evening. . . . Yes. . . . She's right here. . . . Just a moment."

But it required less than a moment for Mrs. Jenks to reach the 'phone.

"Oh yes, Mrs. Colby. Good evening." (A pause.) "Well, that's wonderfully sweet of you, wonderfully sweet." Mrs. Jenks positively couldn't help it. She put her hand over the transmitter and then, in an aside, "She's congratulating me on the stand I've taken." She removed her hand and

resumed: "That's perfectly lovely of you, Mrs. Colby. But you really don't know how much you did"—in which Mrs. Jenks was quite mistaken. "We'll show them a thing or two, won't we?" Mrs. Jenks knew in her heart that every woman present envied her that "we'll." Another pause. Another: "Yes, yes. How perfectly lovely! You don't know how much you're doing for Meadeville, Mrs. Colby. Isn't that wonderful?" (Pause.) "Yes, thank you so much. Good night."

Mrs. Jenks turned to her guests.

"You all heard what she said to me"—with the accent on the "me."

As a matter of fact, they'd only heard what Mrs. Jenks said Mrs. Colby had said, but Mrs. Jenks was quite truthful in her recital of it, for Mrs. Colby's remarks had been eminently flattering. The hostess lifted her finger.

"What do you think? Mrs. Colby is going to retrench all along the line. She's going to drive her own car; she's going to do her own shopping; she's going to have her clothes made over by Henrietta Bates

down on Elm Street; and she's going to let Mary Bates do her hats over. She says Mary takes the old materials and makes up hats just as good as new. And she says Mr. Colby is quite willing to tend his own furnace and mow his own lawn if necessary."

"Goodness!" said Mrs. Socks Baron to Mrs. Army Shoes Bingham, *sotto voce*, "but she's getting thick with the Colbys!"

Mrs. Jenks's sensitive ears caught the remark, but she made no haste to deny it.

"I can go Mrs. Colby one better," cried Mrs. Army Shoes Bingham. "I'm not so helpless, if anybody should ask you. I can make my own hats."

"If it comes to that, I can make all my own clothes," cried Mrs. Socks Baron. "I've still got the old wits I used to have, even if we have made lots of money."

And now that the lady of The Hill had made thrift fashionable, the women who had vied with one another in spending, even bragged about how helpless they were without servants, now began to brag about how they could save and how capable they were of doing everything themselves.



Flabby Briggs broke in: "You ladies haven't got anything on me." He drew up his chest proudly. "I want you all to know I've just been emancipated from two years of servitude. I celebrated the event by getting under my car and lying on my back and tinkering with its insides all the afternoon at four dollars an hour. I'll be a rich man pretty soon from what I don't have to pay out." He paused. "And to-morrow morning I'm going to begin mowing my own lawn right under your window at six o'clock, Will Skinner."

"Glad you told me about it," said Skinner. "I'll change my bedroom."

"Oh, dear," cried Annabelle Howe—her white hands in the air—"oh, dear, it's all so wonderful! Do you know, dear Mrs. Jenks, we've been talking it over and we've all decided to follow your perfectly wonderful example and give all our parties just the same—servants or no servants?"

"Bravo!" cried Jimmy Dooling. "We'll call this day Fourth of July the Second."

At this point Mrs. Jenks produced from the sideboard a number of white aprons.



"Advance, sir knights, and receive your decorations."

And the first one, designed for a slender maid, she miraculously adjusted to corpulent Army Soup Morrissey.

Flabby Briggs, who had suddenly become a self-constituted wag, bowing low, accepted the honor with: "I've always regarded this apron as a symbol of servitude. I now accept it as a symbol of emancipation."

And, led by Socks Baron, the three gentlemen descended to the lower regions. Presently Jenks made his appearance—the first of the evening—no less welcome from the fact that he bore a wonderful twenty-pound roast on a large platter. This he deposited on the table in front of Jimmy Dooling, who was now equipped with white cap and apron and carving-tools.

"Come one, come all!" cried Dooling. "And I'll give you an object-lesson in carving, an important step in reducing the high cost of living."

With an old-time gesture, Dooling swiped the blade across the steel once or twice and

then proceeded to carve a slice of beef expansive enough to cover a dinner-plate, but little thicker than a sheet of paper—and the feast was on.

When the supper was ended the signal was given for the dance, and, as the striking servants had not been affiliated with any union, the musicians did not refuse to play.

And my, didn't they dance—those joyous emancipated ones! All the newly acquired form, all the newfangled restrictive falderals, were abandoned. They capered about like children, just as they had done at barn dances in the good old times. Honey Skinner did a one step with Canned Beans Henderson. W. Bentinck Bentinck tangoed with Mrs. Socks Baron. And Jimmy Dooling and Mrs. Craddock buried their feud long enough to be partners for the Virginia Reel.

Yes, it was a wonderful party. Everybody said so. At the tail end of it Army Soups Morrissey moved a vote of thanks to Mrs. Jenks. Said he:

“We've all wanted to do it all along, but

we didn't know how, and you've shown us."

Then they gave three rousing cheers for the hostess, and the party broke up.

Said Skinner, on the way home: "I told you the whole high-cost-of-living bugaboo was psychological, Honey. The simple life solves the whole thing. You've seen it for yourself to-night."

Honey pondered a bit, then, "I know Fanny Jenks 'll think she did it all."

"Who cares, so long as the thing's done? And she did give the meeting."

"And Mrs. Jim Biddle 'll think she did it all."

"She did the talking, didn't she?"

"And of course Mrs. Colby 'll think she did it all."

"Well," said Skinner, "she's the key-stone of the arch. Can't get away from that, can you?"

Honey squeezed Skinner's arm and giggled. "And you know you were the one who did it, you sly dog."

"Of course I know I was the one who did it," said Skinner, not over-modestly.

When they reached home Skinner turned the light up, there being no butler present to perform that arduous task.

"Come into the library, Honey." Again Skinner exerted himself to turn up the light. Then he drew from his waistcoat pocket the slip of paper. "It was this—this little slip of paper I clipped from the correspondence column of *The Sun*." Holding it up, he read:

"LITTLE LOLITA SUGGESTS THE WAY

"How to become a society leader. Now is the time. For many ambitious women, so papa says, are capitalizing civic duty to further their own social ends. The ambitious matron, so mamma says, has only to interest herself in some sanitary work or some mercy scheme to become famous overnight. I am only a little girl, but if I lived in a village or small town, I'd start something—something which everybody was interested in, like the high cost of living—and I'd use my house, my servants, and even my husband to push it along. And everybody 'd follow me like a flock of sheep. It's dead easy.

"LOLITA C. SWEET.

"So you see, Honey, I didn't do it. Lolita did it."

Honey regarded Skinner with infinite fondness.

"How wonderful you are, dearie—how perfectly wonderful! If they'd only had you over there at the Peace Conference, what wouldn't you have done?"

"I know darned well what I'd like to have done," Skinner growled.

THE END



BOOKS BY  
JOHN SPARGO

---

*RUSSIA AS AN AMERICAN PROBLEM*

*THE PSYCHOLOGY OF BOLSHEVISM*

*BOLSHEVISM*

*SOCIAL DEMOCRACY EXPLAINED*

*AMERICANISM AND SOCIAL DEMOCRACY*

---

HARPER & BROTHERS  
NEW YORK    ESTABLISHED 1817    LONDON



BOOKS BY  
REX BEACH

---

*THE WINDS OF CHANCE*  
*TOO FAT TO FIGHT*  
*LAUGHING BILL HYDE*  
*RAINBOW'S END*  
*THE AUCTION BLOCK*  
*THE CRIMSON GARDENIA*  
*THE IRON TRAIL*  
*THE SPOILERS*  
*THE BARRIER*  
*THE SILVER HORDE*  
*THE NET*  
*THE NE'ER-DO-WELL*  
*HEART OF THE SUNSET*  
*GOING SOME*

---

HARPER & BROTHERS  
NEW YORK [ESTABLISHED 1817] LONDON

BOOKS BY  
ZANE GREY

---

*THE MAN OF THE FOREST*

*TALES OF FISHES*

*THE U. P. TRAIL*

*THE DESERT OF WHEAT*

*WILDFIRE*

*THE HERITAGE OF THE DESERT*

*RIDERS OF THE PURPLE SAGE*

*DESERT GOLD*

*THE LIGHT OF WESTERN STARS*

*THE LONE STAR RANGER*

*THE RAINBOW TRAIL*

*THE BORDER LEGION*

*KEN WARD IN THE JUNGLE*

*THE YOUNG LION HUNTER*

*THE YOUNG FORESTER*

*THE YOUNG PITCHER*

---

HARPER & BROTHERS

NEW YORK [ESTABLISHED 1817] LONDON





1000

1000





09-BAU-606

